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Critical Notes

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREEK BIBLE ON THE PESHITTA

It is generally known that, in matters relating to the textual criticism of the Bible, the Peshitta has been obliged to take a subordinate place to other versions, if not entirely neglected. On the other hand the Greek Bible almost invariably receives first consideration. The inevitable result of this tendency has been to curtail the critical authority of the Syriac Bible when it differs from both the Hebrew and the Greek texts. But while the Syriac rendering is seldom, if ever, adopted against both Greek and Hebrew, it is yet considered to be a somewhat strong confirmation of the version with which it agrees.

If we are to lay down the general a priori rule that the Peshitta is in error when it stands alone, it must follow that its agreement with either or all of the other versions is a matter of no consequence. Such a conclusion no one will admit; but the question still remains open: How much importance shall be attached to the Syriac variants which are against the other authorities? The answer to this question must depend largely upon the answer to another question: Is the Peshitta as we possess it an altogether independent translation? If it is, its critical value is greater than that now ascribed to it; but if not, if it has been influenced by other versions, it must ever content itself with a place subordinate to the older translations of the Bible.

It has repeatedly been asserted that the original text of the Peshitta was influenced by the LXX.¹ Indeed, the striking agreement between many variants of the Peshitta and the LXX from the Massoretic text has long been recognized. It was noticed and commented upon by such scholars as Credner,² Perles,³ Ryssel,⁴ Baethgen,⁵ Cornill,⁶ Gottheil,⁷ and many others. Some

¹ See J. G. Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das AT*, I (Leipzig, 1780–83), 452; K. A. Credner, *De prophetarum minor. vers. Syr.*, etc. (1827), p. 112; F. Baethgen, *Jahrb. f. prot. Theol.* (1882), p. 435; C. H. Cornill, *Ezechiel*, pp. 153 f.; M. Sebök, *Die syr. Uebersetz. d. zwölf kl. Proph.*, p. 7; F. Buhl, *Kanon und Text d. AT*, p. 190; Gottheil, in *Mitteilungen d. Ak.-Orient. Vereins zu Berlin*, No. 2 (Berlin, 1889), p. 25, n. 14; Bleek-Wellhausen, *Einleitung*, etc. (6th ed., 1893), p. 560; H. Pinkuss, *ZATW* (1894), pp. 94 ff.; W. E. Barnes, *JTS*, II, 186 ff.; A. Sch. Kamenetzky, *ZATW* (1904), p. 237, and others.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 109; cf. Sebök, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–8.

³ *Melet. Peschit.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Micha*, p. 169.

⁵ *Untersuchungen*, etc., p. 25.

⁶ *Ezechiel*, pp. 153 f.

⁷ *Loc. cit.*

scholars have given this subject their special attention,¹ not to speak of the occasional remarks scattered in various works on the textual criticism of the Bible. Yet it was not until recent times that the question became the subject of systematic study. But the problem is beset with many difficulties. It is now generally recognized that neither version is homogeneous; many hands or groups of hands are to be detected in the Peshitta just as in the LXX, and neither version offers a settled text to work upon. Besides, the materials for comparing the Peshitta with the LXX, and for tracing the changes which the Syriac version is supposed to have undergone in the lapse of time from external influences, are extremely meager and scanty. Students of the LXX know that the translators of that version not uncommonly misread, and so mistranslated, quite common Hebrew words, even though their mistranslation destroys the meaning of the passage.² John Taylor³ is very likely not far from the truth in his assertion that "the LXX ought not to be credited with so overwhelming an influence over the other versions as is frequently ascribed to it."

It has been shown⁴ beyond any shadow of a doubt that in the LXX different groups of books are due to different groups of translators. The same as we have already noticed⁵ may also be claimed for the Peshitta. It is difficult to believe that the same school of translators rendered into Syriac both the Pentateuch and the Psalms, and "if there were as many as two schools, there may well have been more."⁶ Eberhard Nestle⁷ has advanced proofs for the theory of a variety of translators in the Peshitta. The fact is that the Syriac Pentateuch contains some bold anthropomorphisms, while the Syriac Psalms cautiously exclude expressions in which God is compared with the things of sense.

The unsettled state of the text of the Peshitta presents another difficulty. It is necessary to distinguish, one from the other, as many as three streams of influence issuing from the LXX and bearing on the Syriac. It is remarkable—the Syriac translators themselves seem to have been affected—"for any text critically constructed from the earliest Eastern and Western MSS must show some signs not to be mistaken of the influence of the Greek version."⁸

¹ Credner, *loc. cit.*, advanced the theory that the very translators of the Peshitta made direct use of the LXX. But all other scholars doubt this. See, e.g., R. Simon, *Hist. crit. du vieux test.* (1678), p. 277; Bertholdt, *Hist. Krit. Einleitung*, etc., II (1812-19), 597; L. Hirzel, *De Pentateuchi versionis syriacae, quam Pesch. vocant, indole*, etc. (Leipzig, 1815), p. 24; Herbst, *Hist. Krit. Einleitung*, I, 196, and many others.

² Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Samuel*, p. lx.

³ *Micah*, p. v.

⁴ Swete, *Intr. to the O.T. in Greek*, pp. 315-19.

⁵ *AJSL*, July, 1919.

⁶ Barnes, *JTS*, II (1900-1901), 187.

⁷ In Herzog's *REPT*³, III, 167 ff.

⁸ Barnes (*op. cit.*, p. 187) derived this impression "from an examination of MSS belonging to eight different collections in England, France, Germany, and Italy."

Besides, the transcribers of the earlier MSS have been influenced in places by the LXX through the Syriac translation of the Hexaplar text made by Paul of Tella. A more direct influence was no doubt exerted through the church fathers who were Greek in education, though they presided over Syrian dioceses, such as Theodor of Mopsuestia, to whom the headings of the Psalms found in many early MSS of the Peshitta are due.¹ One must also not overlook the fact that the transcribers of the latter MSS have been influenced, at any rate, in the Psalms, by the recommendation of readings of the Greek in preference to those of the Peshitta made by Bar Hebraeus in his ܐܘܙܪ ܪܐܙܐ *Auzar Rāzā* (i.e., Scholia on the Bible).² As the printed text was taken from late MSS, it too owes something to the emendations of Bar Hebraeus.

W. E. Barnes³ has succeeded in his endeavor to show "that the influence of the LXX frequently takes effect on the ideas or on the manner of the Syriac translators rather than on their words," and in support of his contention quotes "instances in which the expression as well as the thought of the Syriac has been affected by the Greek."⁴ He furthermore maintains that this so-called influence of the Greek is for the most part sporadic, affecting the translation of a word here and there. The Syriac translators must indeed have known that their own knowledge of Hebrew was far in advance of the knowledge possessed by the translators of the LXX, and yet the stress of Greek fashion has its way now and again. The Syriac transcribers, on the contrary, were ignorant of Hebrew and ready to introduce readings found in a Greek version or recommended by a Greek church father. So the Peshitta in its later text has more of Greek influence than in its earlier form. It is only in the Psalms that any general Greek influence bringing in a new characteristic, which lies in a dread of anthropomorphism from which the Syriac translators of the Pentateuch were free, is to be found.

On the influence of the LXX on the Syriac Psalms scholars speak with certainty.⁵ But when they try to apply the same theory to other books of

¹ See Prager, *De Vet. Test.*, etc., pp. 52-56. It is for this reason that the superscriptions of the Syriac Psalms cannot be involved in the questions of origin and authorship of the Peshitta. See Nestle, in *Theol. Literatur z.* (1876), XI, and Baethgen, *Untersuchungen*, etc., p. 10.

² Cf. Rahlfs's "Beiträge," etc., *ZATW*, IX (1889), 171-80.

³ *JTS*, II, 186 ff.

⁴ Barnes, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-91.

⁵ See, e.g., Berg, *The Influence of LXX upon the Peshitta Psalter*. Indeed there were scribes (found in codices A, D, E, F) who labored under the astounding belief that they were transcribing the *David of the Separated Ones* (ܕܐܘܕܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܥܡܐ), i.e., of the Seventy who worked according to an often-repeated tradition in separate cells. See Eusebius *Hist. Ecc.* 8, 10, (ܥܢܐܢ ܕܡܢ ܕܥܡܐ ܕܡܢ ܕܥܡܐ), "which was translated by them from the language of Palestine into Hebrew, and from Hebrew into Greek, and from Greek into Syriac." Those who believed that the Seventy had translated their own Greek into the Syriac of the Peshitta would naturally strive to correct copies of the Syriac by the help of the LXX.

the Bible they speak with less confidence and avoid hasty conclusions.¹ Thus Nestle,² e.g., is very cautious neither to affirm nor to deny the influence of the LXX on the Peshitta, within the limits of the Pentateuch. It is indeed dangerous ground, for both the Haggada and the Halakah have influenced the Peshitta and the LXX,³ and this influence may have touched both versions independently in the same progress. Hence, even in cases where a well-attested reading of the Peshitta agrees with the LXX, and is probably derived from it, allowance must also be made for the fact that such a reading may on the contrary be due to a corruption within the Syriac itself, for a single stroke makes the difference of reading. But wherever there is a real difficulty in the text, the LXX and the Peshitta each pursue their own way.

Assuming that "it seems tolerably certain that alterations were made from time to time with a view of harmonizing the Syriac text with that of LXX,"⁴ we must reckon with another difficulty: namely, the condition of the LXX text. As the active influence of the Greek over the Syriac lasted, it seems, for a period extending over several centuries, the Greek text itself underwent considerable change. Sometimes the hand laid on the Peshitta is that of the unrevised LXX, sometimes it is the hand of Theodotion⁵ or Symmachus acting through the Hexaplar text. The Greek Bible in almost any form seems to have carried weight with the Syrians. It is now quite a well-known fact that for various reasons such Syrians as Theodor of Mop-suestia and Bar Hebraeus preferred the use of the LXX or the Syro-Hexaplar version instead of the Peshitta. Such an authority as C. F. Burkitt⁶ is inclined to trace the hand of Palût, or the mission from Antioch which is associated with the name of Palût and Serapion, in every case where Greek influence is found in the Peshitta.

In the light of what has been said above, there can be no question that Ryssel⁷ is correct when he says, "Bei der Vergleichung der Pesch. mit dem hebr. Urtexte muss man immer im Auge behalten, dass die syrische Übersetzung, wenigstens in ihrer gegenwärtigen Gestalt, vielfach von der LXX abhängig ist." But the mutual relation of the versions has an important

¹ Roediger, article "Peschitto," in *Ersch und Gruber's Real-Encycl.*, col. 292b; Herbst, *op. cit.*, I, 196.

² *REPT*³, III, 170.

³ Cf. Frankel, *Vorstudien z. d. LXX*, pp. 183 f., and Perles, *loc. cit.*; Roediger, *loc. cit.*: "Aus gelegentlichen Übereinstimmungen lässt sich noch durchaus nicht mit Sicherheit auf solche Benutzung schliessen, da dieselben auf gleichförmiger traditioneller Erklärung des Grundtextes, oder auf späterer Conformirung, oder gar auf zufälligem Zusammen-treffen, beruhen können."

⁴ Wright, *Syriac Literature*, p. 4. Barnes (*JTS*, II, 191) produces evidence from MSS that have been preserved "which illustrate the process of corruption from the LXX under which the Peshitta suffered for centuries."

⁵ See, e.g., Cornill, *Ezechiel*, p. 154.

⁶ *Early Eastern Christianity*, p. 73.

⁷ *Micha*, p. 169.

bearing on their value as witnesses, and subsequently the presence or absence of interdependence must be established more or less definitely. However, in the present state of the work along the lines of textual criticism of the Bible, the student must weigh his evidence upon his own intellectual scales and decide by no other index than his own judgment. Modern scholars have in recent years formulated various sets of rules by the aid of which students are more or less guided in their work. Thus Merx¹ laid down the following rules, each of which, however, may be subject to exceptions:

I. Stimmt Peschita und Septuaginta gegen den masoretischen Text, so enthalten sie das Aeltere.

II. Stimmt Peschita und Masora gegen Septuaginta, so hat letztere das Präjudiz, aber nicht die Gewissheit, das Echte zu bieten.

III. Stimmt Masora und Septuaginta gegen Peschita, so können nur die gewichtigsten innern Gründe die Entscheidung auf die Seite der Peschitalenken.

These are substantially the rules now generally followed by textual critics of the Bible. But to show that the Peshitta is not an independent translation it is not sufficient simply to discern traces of Greek influence in the rendering of individual words. It must be determined, if possible, how that influence was brought to bear upon the text; whether the LXX was the original text or a critical commentary, only such renderings being accepted as in the judgment of the Syriac translators best expressed the meaning of the original; or whether there was a still greater dependence, the LXX being employed as a translation in a language more familiar than the Hebrew, and as such being often bodily substituted in phrases, and even whole verses, when the original was difficult or unintelligible. Nor must we fail to ascertain whether the readings of both LXX and Peshitta, when they agree, may not be traced to a common source, perhaps the hypothetical archetype.² Indeed, J. H. Dathe³ and L. Hirzel⁴ were of the opinion that both the LXX and the Peshitta go back to a common Hebrew text. Their view was accepted by a goodly number of other scholars.

That there really exists a possible relation between the LXX and the Peshitta as a whole one cannot always doubt. But to determine this possible relationship is not so simple a matter. To see what light is thrown by the Greek and Syriac versions of the Bible on the question of general relationship between these two versions as a whole, it seems necessary first to

¹ *Das Gedicht von Hiob*, p. lxxiii.

² The thesis that all extant Hebrew sources for the text of the Bible go back to a first-century archetype was first advanced by Lagarde in 1863. A similar view was reached by Olshausen in the Introduction to his *Commentary on the Psalms* (1853), pp. 17 ff. The thesis has been accepted with some modifications by such scholars as Nöldeke, Wellhausen, W. R. Smith, Cornill, Driver, and many others. See Joseph Reider in *JQR*, VII (1917), 287 f.

³ J. H. Dathe, *Opusc. crit.*, pp. 83 ff.; *Psalterium syriacum* (Halle, 1796), p. xxx.

⁴ L. Hirzel, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

examine these two texts and collate the cases where the Greek and Syriac agree as over against the Massoretic text. Such cases would naturally demand a careful consideration of the question as to whether the Greek and the Syriac do really go back to a common Hebrew source, differing from that of the Massoretic text. In considering the question of dependency of the Greek and Syriac upon one another one must also bear in mind the later editorial efforts which sought to bring both the Greek and Syriac texts of the Bible in harmony with one another. To attempt the solution of this complicated problem one must (*a*) collate all the variant readings of the Peshitta and decide upon the original form of the Syriac; (*b*) list all cases of agreement between the Peshitta and the LXX as over against the Massoretic text, and also those between the Syriac and various groups of Greek MSS; and on the basis of facts thus obtained proceed to consider the origin of these agreements. As a rule these questions of dependence must be settled by a process of elimination; otherwise one may be dealing with mere coincidence. Only where the rendering of one version might be reduced to an error of misinterpretation of the other would a certain criterion of dependence be found. But such cases are very few indeed. The problem of the dependency of the versions as a whole is very complicated, and Professor Max L. Margolis¹ is undoubtedly right in his assertion that "no single method will do justice to the problem."

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¹ *JQR*, III (1912-13), 132.